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H.332

Introduced by Representatives Hango of Berkshire, Durfee of Shaftsbury,  
Birong of Vergennes, Gregoire of Fairfield, Harrison of  
Chittenden, Higley of Lowell, James of Manchester, Morrissey  
of Bennington, Page of Newport City, Smith of New Haven,  
and Williams of Granby

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Health; professions and occupations; workforce development;  
scholarships; loan repayment; physician assistants; advanced practice  
registered nurses

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish the  
Physician Assistant and Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Educational  
Benefit Program to provide scholarship and loan repayment opportunities for  
students pursuing a master's degree in physician assistant studies or in nursing,  
and to individuals who have received a master's degree in physician assistant  
studies or nursing, who agree to provide health care services as a physician  
assistant or advanced practice registered nurse in Vermont for two years for  
each year of scholarship or loan repayment assistance awarded.

1       An act relating to expanding loan repayment opportunities for physician  
2       assistants and advanced practice registered nurses

3       It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

4       Sec. 1. FINDINGS

5       The General Assembly finds:

6           (1) Vermont continues to experience a health care workforce shortage,  
7       particularly in primary care. In 2018, more than 40 percent of the primary care  
8       physicians in seven of Vermont's 14 counties were 60 years of age or older. In  
9       addition, specialty practices often have long wait times for initial screening and  
10       diagnostic appointments; increasing the number of physician assistants  
11       available to deliver these services would increase timely access to health care  
12       services, especially in rural areas.

13           (2) Increasing the supply of physician assistants in Vermont may help  
14       mitigate the nursing workforce shortage by encouraging registered nurses to  
15       remain in direct patient care roles.

16           (3) Vermont does not offer any training programs for physician  
17       assistants. Physician assistants are in high demand across the country, and  
18       physician assistants are often hired by the same hospitals and clinics they  
19       experienced during their clinical rotations. Without a physician assistant  
20       training program in Vermont, fewer physician assistant students have the  
21       opportunity to learn in Vermont settings and may be less likely to consider or  
22       receive employment offers from Vermont providers after graduation.

1           (4) Newly licensed physician assistants often carry significant debt from  
2           loans taken out to fund their physician assistant education.

3           (5) Of the existing loan repayment programs for which physician  
4           assistants are eligible, some favor practice settings like federally qualified  
5           health centers at the expense of independent practices. Many independent  
6           practices are located in more rural parts of the State. In addition, some existing  
7           programs require the employer to provide matching funds, which creates an  
8           additional barrier to the number of students who may access those programs.

9           (6) The State has level-funded the appropriation for the State  
10           educational loan repayment program for which physician assistants are eligible  
11           since fiscal year 2016, even as tuition for physician assistant training programs  
12           continues to increase.

13           Sec. 2. 18 V.S.A. § 34 is added to read:

14           § 34. PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT AND ADVANCED PRACTICE

15           REGISTERED NURSE EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT PROGRAM

16           (a) Definitions. As used in this section:

17           (1) “Eligible individual” means an individual who satisfies the eligibility  
18           requirements under this section for a scholarship or loan repayment.

19           (2) “Eligible school” means an approved postsecondary education  
20           institution, as defined under 16 V.S.A. § 2822.

1           (3) “Gift aid” means grant or scholarship financial aid received from the  
2           federal government or from the State.

3           (4) “Loan repayment” means the cancellation and repayment of loans  
4           under this section.

5           (5) “Loans” means education loans guaranteed, made, financed,  
6           serviced, or otherwise administered by the Corporation under this subchapter  
7           for attendance at an eligible school.

8           (6) “Program” means the Physician Assistant and Advanced Practice  
9           Registered Nurse Educational Benefit Program created under this section.

10           (7) “Scholarship” means a scholarship awarded under this section  
11           covering tuition, room, board, and the cost of required books and supplies for  
12           up to full-time attendance at an eligible school.

13           (b) Program creation. The Physician Assistant and Advanced Practice  
14           Registered Nurse Educational Benefit Program is created and shall be  
15           administered by the Corporation. The Program provides scholarships to  
16           students enrolled in an eligible school who commit to working as a physician  
17           assistant or advanced practice registered nurse in this State and who meet the  
18           eligibility requirements in subsection (d) of this section. The Program also  
19           provides loan repayment on behalf of individuals working as a physician  
20           assistant or advanced practice registered nurse in this State and who meet the  
21           eligibility requirements in subsection (e) of this section.

1       (c) The scholarship and loan repayment benefits provided under the  
2       Program shall be paid on behalf of the eligible individual by the Corporation,  
3       subject to the appropriation of funds by the General Assembly specifically for  
4       this purpose.

5       (d) Eligibility for scholarships. To be eligible for a scholarship under the  
6       Program, an individual, whether a resident or nonresident, shall satisfy all of  
7       the following requirements:

8           (1) be enrolled at an eligible school in a program that leads to a master's  
9           degree in physician assistant studies or in nursing;

10          (2) continually demonstrate satisfactory academic progress by  
11          maintaining a 3.0 grade point average or better or the equivalent as determined  
12          by the Corporation if the eligible school does not use grade point averages;

13          (3) have used any available gift aid;

14          (4) have executed a contract with the Corporation committing the  
15          individual to work as a physician assistant or advanced practice registered  
16          nurse in this State;

17          (5) have executed a promissory note obligating the individual to repay  
18          the individual's scholarship benefit, in whole or in part, if the individual fails  
19          to complete the period of service required in subsection (f) of this section; and

20          (6) have completed the Program's application form, the free application  
21          for federal student aid (FAFSA), and the Vermont grant application each

1 academic year of enrollment in accordance with a schedule determined by the  
2 Corporation.

3 (e) Eligibility for loan repayment. To be eligible for loan repayment under  
4 the Program, an individual shall satisfy all of the following requirements:

5 (1) graduated from an eligible school where the individual has, within  
6 the past five years, been awarded a master's degree in physician assistant  
7 studies or in nursing;

8 (2) had an overall 3.0 grade point average or better or the equivalent as  
9 determined by the Corporation if the eligible school does not use grade point  
10 averages from the eligible school;

11 (3) work as a physician assistant or advanced practice registered nurse in  
12 this State; and

13 (4) be a resident of Vermont.

14 (f) Service commitment.

15 (1) Scholarships. For each two years of service as a physician assistant  
16 or advanced practice registered nurse in this State, an eligible individual shall  
17 be entitled to a full academic year of full scholarship benefit under the  
18 Program. If an eligible individual fails to serve as a physician assistant or  
19 advanced practice registered nurse in this State for a period that would entitle  
20 the individual to the full scholarship benefit received by the individual, other  
21 than for good cause as determined by the Corporation, then the individual shall

1 reimburse the Corporation a pro rata portion of the scholarship paid under the  
2 Program pursuant to the terms of the interest-free reimbursement promissory  
3 note signed by the individual at the time of entering the Program.

4 (2) Loan repayment. An eligible individual shall be entitled to an  
5 amount of loan cancellation and repayment under this section equal to one year  
6 of loans for every for two years of service as a physician assistant or advanced  
7 practice registered nurse in this State.

8 (g) Priorities. In light of the lack of physician assistant training programs  
9 in Vermont, first priority for scholarships under the Program shall be for  
10 students enrolled in a program leading to a master's degree in physician  
11 assistant studies, and first priority for loan repayment under the Program shall  
12 be for individuals recently awarded a master's degree in physician assistant  
13 studies.

14 (h) Awards. The Corporation shall award scholarships and loan  
15 repayments in amounts that are sufficient to attract high-quality candidates  
16 while also making a meaningful increase in Vermont's health care professional  
17 workforce.

18 (i) Adoption of policies, procedures, and guidelines. The Corporation shall  
19 adopt policies, procedures, and guidelines necessary to implement the  
20 provisions of this section.

1       (j) Reports. On or before January 15 of each year, the Corporation shall  
2       report data and other relevant factors, including the costs of the Program to  
3       date, to the House Committees on Health Care and on Commerce and  
4       Economic Development; the Senate Committees on Health and Welfare and on  
5       Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs; and the Governor. The  
6       provisions of 2 V.S.A. § 20(d), expiration of reports, shall not apply to the  
7       reports to be made under this subsection.

8       Sec. 3. PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT AND ADVANCED PRACTICE

9               REGISTERED NURSE EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT PROGRAM;

10              APPROPRIATION

11       The sum of \$200,000.00 in Global Commitment investment funds is  
12       appropriated to the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation in fiscal year  
13       2022 for scholarship and loan repayment awards through the Physician  
14       Assistant and Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Educational Benefit  
15       Program established by this act.

16       Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

17       This act shall take effect on July 1, 2021.